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SUBJECT: Helmand's New Provincial Council At First Glance:

11. (SBU) Summary: According to preliminary results, Provincial Council (PC) elections in Helmand produced a large turnover, with an unfortunate increase in the number of members with ties to the drugs trade or malign powerbrokers. Fraud may have played a role. The PRT is prepared to work around the PC if necessary. End summary.

12. (SBU) On September 27, the Independent Elections Commission (IEC) released its preliminary results for Provincial Council (PC) elections in Helmand. The results indicated a large turnover from the last PC, with just three incumbents - Haji Mohammad Anwar Khan (Chair), Haji Mohammad Naim Khan, and Razya Baloch (one of four female members) - being re-elected. (Note: The Haji Abdul Ahad elected this time is a different individual from the person of the same name on the last PC.)

13. (SBU) At first glance the new PC in many ways represents a step backwards from the previous iteration. As compared to the previous composition, a greater number of new members have ties to the drugs trade or malign Helmandi powerbrokers (Sher Muhammad Akhonzada (SMA), Abdul Rahman Jan (ARJ), Amir Muhammad Akhonzada (AMA), etc). However, this should not be read as a good institution being taken over by bad actors, as the prior PC contained members with ties to each of these unpalatable elements as well, only now the weighting is a bit different. The important difference is that the new PC will likely have fewer honest brokers with whom the PRT and Provincial Governor's office can work productively. Even though several members appear to be linked to known malign actors such as SMA, the strength of these links and the level of influence SMA and others may have over them is altogether unclear. Unfortunately, the two most effective members from the last PC, Haji Qurban Ali Oruzgani and Eng. Ismail Khan, both declined to seek re-election.

14. (SBU) Of the new faces, Syful Malok and Ali Ahmad appear to be the best bets for productive engagement. They are both regarded locally as honest and are reasonably well educated, and do not have known ties to the drugs trade or SMA. On the negative side, most of the other new members are connected to the SMA/ARJ/AMA group, although again the nature of these ties is unclear. Two PC members, both re-elected incumbents, are major poppy growers (Anwar Khan and Naim Khan). Atawullah, Nimatullah, and Abdul Bari Fayaz are reputed to have some level of Taliban connections.

15. (SBU) There appears to be a correlation between the home district and tribal affiliation of top vote-getters and those locations associated with suspected large-scale ballot stuffing during the election, indicating that some members may have fraudulently won their seats. In terms of tribal dynamics, the new PC will be dominated by members of the Barakzai (5), Norzai (4), and Alizai (3) tribes, which may prove a source of tension in Helmand's fractured tribal environment.

Comment

16. (SBU) The connections to malign powerbrokers, especially SMA,

could have a substantial and negative impact on the PRT's relationship with the new PC. While it remains to be seen just how much influence SMA has over these members, if SMA does pull the strings the PC will not be a vehicle for genuine governance. In that instance, the PRT would maintain a formal relationship with the PC through regular meetings and briefings, but would sideline it in practice by not involving the PC in programmatic or funding decisions, and would not give the PC power over Community Councils or other instruments of local governance.